

Guidance to Idaho's Counties and Agencies From the Idaho State Fire Plan Working Group

Background

The Idaho Statewide Implementation Strategy for the National Fire Plan (July 2002) was developed collaboratively by members of the Idaho State Fire Plan Working Group to provide direction in Idaho to achieve the goals of the Western Governors' 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy (2001) and its Implementation Plan (2002). In the Idaho strategy we agreed that we would collaborate at the county level in Idaho, and that a local County Wildland Fire Interagency Group would identify threats and vulnerabilities to wildland fire across ownerships and would develop a mitigation plan to address those threats. We also suggested that projects should be prioritized locally across federal and non-federal lands toward community protection at the wildland urban interface. At about this same time, our counties were asked to prepare county all-hazard plans by the Bureau of Disaster Services to be eligible for FEMA pre-disaster mitigation funds. Planning funds were made available to the counties by member agencies of the State Working Group. Our counties responded overwhelmingly to develop County Wildland Fire Assessment and Mitigation Plans. Most counties decided to develop a single county fire plan to satisfy both the Idaho Implementation Strategy and the BDS/FEMA wildland fire chapter of the all-hazards plan.

Within every one of Idaho's 44 counties, our County Commissioners or their designees are leading the local planning effort. People have engaged and have either completed or are working on their local plan. Our local fire chiefs, land management agencies, citizens, resource conservation and development councils, local emergency planning committees, tribes, professional planning consultants, and many other people are making this happen in Idaho. It is our understanding that we will have completed county plans in every county in Idaho by the end of this calendar year.

Review of County Plans to Date

Of the approximately 11 county plans completed to date, high-risk areas in need of hazardous fuels reduction "community defensible space" work to be completed on the non-federal lands have been identified. Hazardous fuels reduction projects on federal lands were described in a few, but not most, plans reviewed to date.

In order to provide the most effective hazardous fuels reduction work to aid in protection of our communities from wildland fires, it has been, and continues to be, our goal to describe, align, and prioritize the projects at the local level on the federal and non-federal lands in Idaho.

Guidance in Idaho - The Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003

(1) Minimum requirements for Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP): In order for our federal partners (Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management) to utilize the new streamlined planning authorities for hazardous fuels reduction projects on federal lands near our communities, several things need to be in place. The following are three minimum requirements for the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP):

- **Collaboration:**
A CWPP must be collaboratively developed by local and state government representatives in consultation with federal agencies and other interested parties.
- **Prioritized Fuel Reduction:**
A CWPP must identify and prioritize areas for hazardous fuels reduction treatments and recommend the types and methods of treatment that will protect one or more at-risk communities and essential infrastructure.
- **Treatment of Structural Ignitability:**
A CWPP must recommend measures that homeowners and communities can take to reduce the ignitability of structures throughout the area addressed by the plan.

Assuming that the above three minimum requirements are addressed in our County Wildland Fire Hazard Assessment and Mitigation Plans, these plans suffice for the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) described in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. Where your plan does not address these requirements, and where your federal partners have projects to offer in the wildland urban interface where they would like to utilize the HFRA authorities, it may be useful to produce an annex to your county plan which fully addresses the requirements of the CWPP. It is understood by all parties that there may be more detailed project plans under the umbrella of the County Wildland Fire Assessment and Mitigation Plan.

(2) In the absence of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan: An important feature of the Act is that in the absence of a CWPP, Section 101 (16) of the HFRA defines the wildland–urban interface as “(i) an area extending 1/2 mile from the boundary of an at-risk community; (ii) an area within 1 1/2 miles of the boundary of an at-risk community, including any land that (I) has a sustained steep slope that creates the potential for wildfire behavior endangering the at-risk community; (II) has a geographic feature that aids in creating an effective fire break, such as a road or ridge top; or (III) is in condition class 3, as documented by the Secretary in the project-specific environmental analysis; (iii) an area that is adjacent to an evacuation route for an at-risk community that the Secretary determines, in cooperation with the at-risk community, requires hazardous fuels reduction to provide safer evacuation from the at-risk community.”

It is our understanding that County plans in the development stages are including a locally defined “wildland urban interface”. We are aware of a few of the plans which have been completed to date that are annexing the completed plan to include a local definition of the wildland urban interface which best meets the local conditions.

(3) Who must agree to the CWPP?

The Healthy Forests Restoration Act requires that three entities must mutually agree to the final contents of a CWPP:

- The applicable local government – (i.e. counties in Idaho)
- The local fire department(s); and
- The state entity responsible for forest management (IDL in Idaho)

In nearly every county plan reviewed to date, these parties, and many other local partners including the federal land management agencies, have engaged with and have signed the county plan. We believe that signature of the preparing entities demonstrates the high level of collaboration that we are encouraging throughout the State.

(4) Annual Review: The State Working Group suggests that your County Wildland Fire Assessment and Mitigation Plan be reviewed at least annually by all local members and the public to provide for currency in project planning. It is our understanding that many County Wildland Fire Interagency Groups are meeting monthly or bi-monthly to review their action plans and to move forward with their local plan implementation.

(5) The Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) is specifically addressed in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. The Act states that “the Federal Advisory Committee Act shall not apply to the planning process and recommendations concerning community wildfire protection plans.” This is a little noticed but important provision in the legislation. What it means is, at the local level our federal partners are not restricted and may participate fully in development of our plans. They are now free to accept advice and recommendations about project ideas as part of the county planning efforts. Development of the county plans provides a venue for federal partners to work collaboratively to develop a priority list of projects on federal lands and for local interests to participate fully in early review and discussion of project ideas. Federal agency participation should be encouraged where appropriate.

Website: <http://www.idahofireplan.id.gov>

Our website is a resource designed to assist you locally with your work toward community protection. Here is what you'll find:

- Contact information for the Idaho State Fire Plan Working Group members.
- Policy – including the Western Governors' 10-Year Strategy and its Implementation Plan, the Idaho Statewide Implementation Strategy for the National Fire Plan, and the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.
- Completed County Wildland Fire Assessment and Mitigation Plans.
- The Idaho Risk Assessment.
- Useful Ideas Worth Sharing – including standard operating procedures and contracting instruments developed by counties or communities.
- Idaho Grant Families – grant announcements and resources from all agencies to support your efforts.

We've also included with this letter a copy of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan Handbook developed by several entities including the National Association of Counties, Western Governors' Association, and the National Association of State Foresters.

Questionnaire from the Idaho State Fire Plan Working Group to Idaho's Counties

We Need to Hear from You

The State Working Group needs to have an accurate picture of how we are doing with implementation of these policies. Please take a moment to complete this questionnaire. E-mail or snail mail your results to:

Suzanne Cronin

scronin@idl.state.id.us

Idaho Department of Lands

3780 Industrial Avenue S.

Coeur d'Alene, ID 83815

Please respond by July 15, 2004

1. Who are the participating members of your County Wildland Fire Interagency Group?
(Name/Title/Representing Whom/Phone Number)

2. How often do you meet?

3. What is the status of your County Wildland Fire Assessment and Mitigation Plan?

4. Is your County Wildland Fire Assessment and Mitigation Plan compliant with the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003?

5. Have you developed a local definition of "wildland urban interface"?

6. Have you prioritized hazardous fuels reduction projects locally for the non-federal and federal lands?

7. How often do you plan to update your County Plan?

8. Do you have any comment you'd like to share with the Idaho State Fire Plan Working Group?
(Please continue on to additional pages if needed.)

And finally, we would ask that you send Suzanne Cronin these items as you complete them:

- County Plan (digital and hard copy – signed version preferably)
- Local definition of Wildland Urban Interface
- Useful Ideas Worth Sharing and Success Stories

We will post these to our website www.idahofireplan.id.gov
